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Service branding in the cruise industry: A case of the Norwegian Coastal Voyage (Hurtigruten)

Abstract

This paper reports research on service branding carried out on the prestigious Norwegian Coastal Voyage, or Hurtigruten, which is its brand name. The primary research instrument employed in the research was semi-structured in-depth interviews with managers and service personnel previously and presently employed by the shipping line Hurtigruten ASA. The paper shows that a set of factors influences on service branding on the Hurtigruten, the most important being new leadership, management preferences, competitive pressure and changing market preferences. A model is suggested that shows how the identified factors interact and influence service branding on the Hurtigruten.

Key words: service brand; qualitative research; case study research; the Norwegian Coastal Voyage; Hurtigruten

Introduction

Substantial research has been carried out on product branding in manufacturing organisations, but extensive research on services branding and what management actually undertakes in order to achieve a powerful, strong and competitive service brand is to a large extent lacking (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Grönroos, 2000; Davis, 2007; Kelley, 1998; Moorthi, 2002; Turley & Moore, 1995). Therefore, more research on service branding is needed in order to advance the present insight into and understanding of this important field of service management inquiry.

The purpose of this paper is to increase the academic knowledge on services branding in a cruise line context by examining this topic in relation to the prestigious Norwegian Coastal Voyage (NCV), or the Hurtigruten, which is its brand name. Possessing a famous historic brand name such as the Hurtigruten is beneficial in order to work out a compelling brand strategy (Rooney, 1995), and, according to Boyle (2007), a famous and memorable brand name can act as a product advantage. The Hurtigruten is well-known for its brand slogan: *"The most beautiful sea-voyage on earth."* Obviously, this is a visionary brand promise but, according to experts in the field of global tourism, the Hurtigruten has convincingly kept the brand promise by being a global tourism prizewinner several times.

A study on the Hurtigruten is interesting due to historical, cultural, geographical and tourism reasons. In a historic perspective, the Hurtigruten has been an important means of transportation along

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the Norwegian coast since the summer of 1893. Culturally and geographically, the Hurtigruten has provided pride and identity to the scattered coastline population in Norway by uniting the coastal settlements from Bergen to Kirkenes (see Appendix 1 for the geographical orientation). However, it is tourism that has brought this research to realisation as the tourists' segments of the travellers on the Hurtigruten have gradually increased in numbers, as well as in economic importance. In the highly competitive situation in the international cruise line industry today (2012), the Hurtigruten management has set an ambitious strategic goal of becoming a world leader in explorer cruises. Obviously, this implies becoming even more attractive to international and adventure-seeking tourists and the need to expand the Hurtigruten's product offerings in polar areas. Furthermore, the choice of a cruise line context for the study is highly relevant for several other reasons: First, the cruise line industry is in "*an early stage of industrial development*" (Biederman, 2008, p. 197); second, that the cruise industry has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the international tourism industry (Johnston, Lind, Fang & Hui, 2002), third, that the cruise line industry is one of the most profitable of the travel and tourism sectors (Biederman, 2008), and the fourth reason is that, according to the taxonomy developed by Sundbo (1997), the Hurtigruten is a top strategic organisation, which adds to the list of reasons to consider the Hurtigruten an interesting research context due to its economic importance, size and organisational complexity. Thus, the cruise line industry, as one important part of the tourism sector, constitutes an interesting research context as, according to Tsiotsou and Ratten (2006), tourism will continue to be a cornerstone of the global economy.

In Norway, the historic and corporate brand name Hurtigruten is well known and positioned in the minds of the Norwegian people and possesses a strong brand image. In fact, the Hurtigruten appears to be a *power brand* which, according to Gale (1994), is a name that means satisfaction, quality or value to the customer. Nevertheless, in order to be even more attractive to new markets, the brand will play an important role because, as claimed by Urde (1994), "*the future of many companies lies in the brands*". Similarly, a well-positioned, strong and competitive corporate brand may be seen as a guarantee of quality and superior service delivery (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Grönroos, 2007). Nevertheless, today the Hurtigruten is challenged by a growing competition from international cruise line carriers. *Crystal Cruises*, as one example, has offered the product "*14 Night Wonders under the Midnight Sun*" on the *Crystal Serenity*. Similarly, *Cunard* has promoted the product "*14 Night Land of the Midnight Sun*" on the famous *Queen Elisabeth 2*. Thus, in order to stay ahead in global competition, the management of the Hurtigruten has to develop and strengthen its historic and corporate brand.

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of services branding in a cruise line context, two research questions are addressed:

1. Which key factors influence on the management's work on service branding on the Hurtigruten?
2. How do the identified factors influence on service branding on the Hurtigruten?

To answer the research questions posed, the paper is organised in six parts. Following this introduction, part 2 consists of the literature review. In part 3, the methodological details are presented while part 4 presents the research findings. A discussion of the research findings follows in part 5. Part 6 concludes the paper by addressing the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings and draws a set of conclusions. The limitations of the study are discussed in this part and further research is suggested in relation to the research conducted on the Hurtigruten.

The literature

While quite an extensive number of articles on product brands and product brand development have been published in several academic journals, relatively few articles have explicitly explored the branding of services (Blankson & Kalafatis, 1999; Grönroos, 2007; Turley & Moore, 1995), even though the brand is considered *"even more important for services than for goods"* (McDonald, De Chernatony & Harris, 2001, p. 335). Thus, more research on services branding is called for (Davis, 2007).

According to the classic view of product branding, the essence is that a brand consists of a set of perceptions that serves a differential purpose (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2001). However, according to de Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003), service brands are viewed as clusters of functional- and emotional values, which implies a holistic approach to branding (McDonald *et al.*, 2001; de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006) that views service branding as a distinct organisational process that needs to be planned, organised and managed adequately.

The literature part of the paper is structured in two parts. First, following this introduction, important concepts in relation to services branding are clarified. The second part constitutes a section on knowledge development of services branding which is organised in two parts; perspectives of services branding and successful service brand development.

Services branding: Important concepts

In the branding and service branding literature, a host of concepts are conceptualised, such as brand awareness, brand contacts, brand equity, service brand equity, brand identity, brand image, brand knowledge, brand messages, brand associations, brand promise, brand values, service brand co-creation, just to name a few. Obviously, it's beyond the scope of this paper to clarify and discuss such a wide range of concepts. Nevertheless, three concepts will be discussed as they are particularly relevant for the research carried out and reported in this paper. The concepts are the definition of service branding, service brand equity and service brand co-creation. Obviously, it's necessary to clarify what is meant by the construct service branding. Similarly, service brand equity is an important construct from a financial, strategic and consumer behaviour perspective (Davis, 2007). Finally, the concept service brand co-creation is reviewed as, according to theory, service brands need to be developed through intimate contacts with a set of stakeholders, not least the customers (Grönroos, 2007).

The service brand concept

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is *"a name, term, sign, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's product or service as distinct from those of other sellers"*. In relation to the brand name *Hurtigruten*, this definition seems reasonably relevant as there are no competitors that offer a similar cruise product that comprises a travel of 365 days and nights along the Norwegian coast. Nevertheless, according to Grönroos (2007), the AMA's definition is suitable and works for physical products, but not for service products for two reasons. First, the definition misses the key characteristics of services (Andreassen, 2008; Lovelock & Wright, 1999; Kandampully, 2007) and second, that the definition excludes the customers. The essence is that services are processes in which the

customers normally participate, which forms the basis for brand development because, as emphasised by Grönroos (2007, p. 331), *"if anybody builds a brand, it is the customer"*. Grönroos (2007) suggests an alternative brand definition that seems suitable for both physical and service products: *"A brand is created in continuously developing brand relationships, where the customer forms a differentiating image of a physical product, a service or a solution including goods, services, information and other elements, based on all kinds of brand contacts that the customer is exposed to."* The essence of this definition seems to be the process view of services branding and the key role of the customers in brand processes.

By building on Vrontis and Papasolomon (2007), the authors suggest that a service brand is as *"a combination of tangible and intangible elements that uniquely identifies a service produced by one particular service provider and thereby distinguishes it from the competitors' services"*. A definition such as this serves an external as well as an internal purpose (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003), and as brands are information (Davis, 2007), the receivers of information may be both inside as well as outside the company.

The service brand equity concept – in relation to a cruise service

According to branding theory, a brand at the enterprise level is created in the triangle between the company represented by top leadership, its service employees and the customers (Schlager, Bodderas, Mass, & Cachelin, 2011), and in the triangle, the *service brand equity* concept is a key construct.

The *service brand equity* concept is derived from the brand equity concept. Keller (1993), as one example, perceives brand equity as *"the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand"*. The citation implies that a customer's brand knowledge affects the buying intention and behaviour of the customer. Thus, if a consumer assesses a product positively, then favourable brand associations may impact on the consumer's buying intentions and behaviour. This view is in line with Farquhar (1989) who claims that brand equity encompasses the value that a brand name adds to a product. Thus, brand equity is an important marketing construct from a consumer behaviour-, financial- and strategic perspective (Davis, 2007).

Nevertheless, the brand equity construct is associated with tangible products which contrasts service brand equity which constitutes a separate field of literature due to the distinct characteristics of services; those of intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity of quality and perishability (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Hoffman & Bateson, 1997). Illustratively, a cruise cabin not sold when a cruise ship leaves the port can't be stocked and sold at a later occasion. Thus, the cruise line industry shares the same characteristics applicable to services. However, the cruise line industry has also distinct features different from other forms of tourism in that a cruise service can be market as a form of transportation and as a destination (Johnston *et al.*, 2002). Obviously, when the cruise is "consumed", the cruise passengers leave the cruise ship essentially with the memories of their experiences.

The cruise service consists of both tangible and intangible elements (Lovelock & Wright, 1999; Kandampully, 2007), but a tangible element, such as a cabin, does hardly serve a differential purpose, and the challenge for a cruise line operator is to develop the cruise experience which may be done by means of creating a strong, sustainable service brand because a strong service brand visualizes the intangible elements of the cruise service and thereby serve as a risk reducer as perceived by the travellers (Sok & O'Cass, 2011).

By building on Prasad and Dev (2000) who contributed to an understanding of the hotel brand equity construct, the authors suggest that cruise brand equity may be perceived as *"the favourable and unfavourable perceptions and attitudes that are formed and influence a cruise passenger to buy a cruise product"*. Obviously, a cruise line enterprise with a strong brand equity will benefit from travellers having positive perception and attitudes of the company which may impact on brand commitment and loyalty and, according to branding theory, the development of a service brand needs to be done via a co-creation process (Boyle, 2007).

The service brand co-creation concept

Despite the fact the many new brands fail (Kohli, 1997), there are examples of successful brands which are quite old, such as the Hurtigruten. While a goods centric view of brand development has dominated in a product-dominant economy, a service centred view of brand development will dominate in a service-oriented economy (Grönroos, 2007). Under such an economic regime, a service centric view implies that the customers become co-producers of the services which may have implications for brand development because service brands is not static, but are sustained to changes (Simmons, 2007). Thus, developing strong brands will take place through a co-creation process that involves several stakeholders, for example the customers. Boyle (2007), as an example, claims that the co-creation process consists of five distinct stages:

1. The development of a new product with unique perceived product attributes.
2. The creation of brand awareness thorough marketing and other communications.
3. Consumer interpretation of marketing and other communications to form pre-consumption brand associations.
4. Consumption of the product and the formation of post-consumption associations.
5. Repurchase of the intensifying perception of unique benefits leading to brand loyalty.

The goal of the five stage process is to obtain brand loyalty, but, as emphasised, many brands do not succeed as the customers leave and find another supplier who better can meet their needs and preferences. In fact, the customers *"vote by their feet"* (Mattila, 1999). Thus, to become a successful brand, the service provider must deliver unique benefits and superior value as perceived by the customers, and in doing so, the co-creation with the customers appears necessary in service brand development.

Knowledge development: Services branding

This part of the literature review is organised in two parts. First, a section on different perspectives of services branding will be reviewed, followed by a section which reviews successful service brand development.

Perspectives of services branding

In order to understand how service branding develops at the firm level, a choice must be made in relation to a relevant theoretical foundation or perspective. According to de Chernatony and Cottam (2006), there is a need to find a balance between internal and external perspectives, a claim that is supported

by Brodie (2009) who argues that there are multiple theoretical perspectives of branding; those of an economic perspective, a psychological perspective and broader relational social network perspective and cultural perspectives. Illustratively, the economic perspective views the brand as an organisational resource which may provide economic value and generate profits from the enterprise's point of view.

External orientation implies an understanding of the brand as the image of the enterprise alongside external stakeholders which, according to the authors, implies a management perspective that operates at a level beyond a traditional marketing perspective. A management perspective implies that the service brand is considered as a strategic resource which encompasses all organisational levels of the organisation which contrasts a marketing perspective in which the brand is viewed as a marketing communication tool which is the responsibility of the marketing department. Thus, the marketing perspective essentially focuses on marketing communication activities in order to develop and strengthen the brand (Simmons, 2007). The ultimate goal of the communication activities is to impact on the customers' buying intentions and behaviour by connecting the customers emotionally with the brand (Keller, 2003).

Internal orientation implies that the brand play a role inside the company as the success of a brand is the work of everyone in the organisation (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). According to branding theory (Schlager *et al.*, 2011), the employees are an important source of brand equity and the commitment of the employees is important in brand development as the employees' attitudes, beliefs, values and behavioural style reflect the brand promises and brand messages. Thus, the employees play a crucial role in the service brand image formation process. A social, network perspective of services branding then deals with the employees brand commitment and concerns how the brand is experienced by the employees (Brodie, 2009). Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009), discusses this topic in relation to the concept employer brand and identifies several dimensions of the employer brand.

The present state of knowledge seem to be an integrative perspective on service branding which is grounded on a management approach to service brand planning, organising and development (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Brodie, 2009), which implies that successful service brand development does not focus on customers only, but rather on a set of stakeholders, and especially important are the service employees (Grönroos, 2007). In this way, contrasting product branding, service branding concerns more what is actually carried out internally in service enterprises (Free, 1999).

Successful service brand development: Developing a strong brand

A strong service brand is considered as a key asset for businesses competitiveness and survival (de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2001). A well positioned and strong brand differentiates effectively what a company stands for in relation to its competitors (Aaker, 2003; Berry, 2000), and according to Kay (2006), "difference" and "consistency" are the primary driving forces for developing strong brands.

Rowley (2004) argues that there are three aspects of successful brand: First, a brand is dependent on customer perception; second, that the perception is influenced by the added-value characteristics of the product; and third, that the added-value characteristics need to be sustainable. Similarly, according to Doyle, cited in Dibb and Simkin (1993), a strong service brand constitutes four key dimensions; those of quality, superior service, being first and being different which, according to Dobree and Page (1990), may be achieved by following five steps for branding services effectively: First, to establish a brand proposition; second, to overcome the internal barriers to branding; third, to measure the brand

delivery against the proposition; fourth, to secure the continual improvement of the brand; and finally, to expand the brand reputation. By following this process, the idea is that a service will be well positioned in the minds of the targeted customers and given an attractive brand image. Similarly, Simmons (2007) argues that there are three success factors to services branding: First, to understand the customers; second, to carry out effective marketing communication; and third; to engage in ongoing interactions with the customers. Obviously, these drivers to successful service branding are grounded on a marketing perspective. Nevertheless, de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) provide a more comprehensive view on how to obtain successful brands, most important being the need for a holistic and integrated approach to branding, the important role of customers and personalised customer based service and the synergy between the brand and an organisation's culture. Thus, according to this view, to become successful in services branding, a holistic approach is needed which encompasses all layers of an organisation.

Nevertheless, a strong, well-positioned and competitive corporate service brand normally does not just "happen". Most successful service brands are an outcome of years of strategic planning, organising and investments (Hankinson & Hankinson, 1999; Simoes & Dibb, 2001). This implies that service management, including all the layers of the enterprise's organisation, needs to initiate and plan for successful brand development (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). This implies that a range of internal organisational issues has to be considered, most important being to develop a unique service culture to which the service employees are committed and integrated (Heskett, 1987).

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was applied in conducting the research, and the rationale behind this decision was that a qualitative research design is particularly useful when examining organisational phenomena about which relatively little is known (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Veal, 2006; Yin, 2003; among others). The design implies a research paradigm of induction, which is closely connected to the social constructionist viewpoint of scientific knowledge development (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1999; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2002). This part of the paper will address a set of methodological issues, in particular the choice of a case study, data collection, data analysis, research quality and ethical issues.

Case study

In order to research service branding on the Hurtigruten, a case study approach was employed (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). According to Gummesson (2000, p. 87), *"case study research has received growing recognition among groups of management researchers"*. However, case studies vary in character and *"two types are of particular interest"* (Gummesson, 2000, p. 84). The first type aims to draw conclusions from a limited number of cases, while the second aims to draw specific conclusions regarding a single case. The case study reported in this paper belongs to the latter category.

Data collection and the choice of interviewees

An examination of previous empirical research on service branding reveals the use of both primary and secondary research information, and this study is based on both sources. In particular, in a company report entitled "Strategic choices after 2001" (Hurtigruten, 1999), the strategic intent and vision of the

company to become a word-leader in explorer cruises were obtained. However, secondary data may lack the required level of precision and accuracy (Kinnear & Taylor, 1991) as primary research information is more targeted due to the direct coupling with the research questions posed in a study (Veal, 2006).

The personal, face-to-face in-depth interview was judged to be the most appropriate and useful information collection tool. According to Berg (2007), Fielding (1993), Gummesson (2000), Mehmetoglu (2004) and Merriam (1998), among others, the in-depth interview is the most frequently used information collection technique to be employed in qualitative research. In order to carry out the in-depth interviews with the service managers and personnel, the advices offered by McCracken (1988) on how to carry out long interviews were carefully followed. One important issue, for example, is that the investigator *"allows the respondent to tell his or her own story in his or her own terms"* (McCracken, 1988, p. 22), but due to the precise nature of the research questions posed in the study, it was considered important to exercise some "control" in the interview situation, which a semi-structured interview guide may provide (see Appendix 2 for details). During the course of the interviews, each lasting about one and a half hours, it was essential that the respondents could provide descriptive accounts of services branding on the Hurtigruten in their own words. In this way, the interviewees could provide extensive data to serve as a basis for the analytical procedures. The in-depth interviews with the service managers and personnel were carried out during the spring and autumn of 2006 and the winter and spring of 2007.

Nine service employees participated in the research and the respondents constituted a convenience sampling entity. They were selected through a snowball sampling procedure (Merriam, 1998; Sekaran, 1992; among others). Six of the participants were men, while three were women, and six of the participants are today employed by the shipping line Hurtigruten ASA. The participants were judged to be the most knowledgeable persons in relation to service branding on the Hurtigruten.

Data analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed in different ways (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002; Johannessen, Kristoffersen & Tufte, 2004; Mehmetoglu, 2004; Merriam, 1998), and as emphasised by Mehmetoglu (2004, p. 139) and supported by Berg (2007, p. 353), *"a discussion and justification of the analytic strategy should be offered"* in any study. In this research, the in-depth interviews were tape recorded and transcripts were made by the researchers. Reading and rereading of the transcripts were necessary in order to obtain a thorough insight into and understanding of services branding on the Hurtigruten, as perceived by the interviewees. A challenge in the research was to employ an analytical procedure that could provide a comprehensive account of the results obtained in the study (Gummesson, 2000). In this study, the Merriam's (1998) analytical steps of three distinct phases were considered useful for the analysis: Intensive analysis, the development of categories and theory development. As will be demonstrated, the intensive analysis phase of the interview transcripts provided an insight into and understanding of service branding on the Hurtigruten. The intensive analysis then served as a basis for the attempts to develop a set of categories, which in this research represent the factors that influenced service branding on the Hurtigruten. In order to examine how the identified factors influenced on service branding, Merriam's (1998) third analytical phase was employed, a phase that concerns theory development. This phase involved the development of a model that depicts how the identified factors interacted with and influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten.

Research quality

The issue of quality in research always needs careful assessment (Gummeson, 2000), but there are several different opinions on how to obtain quality in qualitative studies (Johannessen *et al.*, 2004). Veal (2006), as an example, discusses the two axioms of research quality; validity and reliability. Validity is perceived as *"the extent to which information collected by the researcher truly reflects the phenomenon being studied"* (Veal, 2006, p. 41). The research phenomenon in this study was service branding on the Hurtigruten. The validity of the research findings is closely linked to the recalling and reporting of the respondents relating to the factors that have influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten. As the respondents were given sufficient time to recall and rethink service branding on the Hurtigruten, the information collected made it possible to identify and develop a set of factors that influenced on this issue on the Hurtigruten. In order to enhance the validity of the research, the respondents were allowed to review their cases, and by doing so, the elimination of the biases normally associated with retrospective in-depth interviews was possible.

Reliability is by Veal (2006, p. 41) explained as *"the extent to which research findings would be the same if the research was to be repeated at a later date with a different sample of subjects"*. However, as the intention of a single-case study *"is not to make generalisation but to investigate a 'one off' situation"* (Clark, Riley, Wilkie & Wood, 1998, p. 103), this study may contribute to the knowledge field of service branding, but is restricted to a specific context: on the Hurtigruten. This point of view is supported by Merriam (1998, p. 206), who argues that the essence is not whether the research findings are fully replicable but *"whether the results are consistent with the data collected"*. Thus, the essence is that the data collected appear trustworthy and dependable, which is in accordance with the view of Yin (2003, p. 37), who argues that the goal of reliability is to *"minimize the errors and biases in a study"*.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues need to be addressed in any empirical study that involves people (Johannessen *et al.*, 2004). According to Nerdrum (1998), three issues in particular need consideration when collecting information from interviewees by means of long interviews. The first issue is the interviewees' right to self-determination and autonomy. The second issue is to respect the interviewees' right to privacy, and the third is to avoid any personal damage. In the research reported on in this paper, the interviewees' right to self-determination and autonomy was particularly relevant, which is an issue addressed by Silverman (2005, p. 258), who emphasises that the principle of *"informed consent"* is vital in any research that involves people. The respondents were not under any pressure to participate in the research. They joined in voluntarily and participated with interest, eager and enthusiasm. Each interviewee was also informed that (s)he was free to leave the interview for any reason, and that the information that was provided would be treated anonymously, but no one decided to leave. To the best of our knowledge, the research has not harmed the respondents in any way.

The findings

In the introduction part of this paper, two research questions were posed and the findings section is organised in relation to these questions.

Research question 1:

Which key factors influence on the management's work on service branding on the Hurtigruten?

The identified factors that have influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten can be organised into three main groups: those of company external, company internal and contextual factors. According to Merriam's (1988) analytical procedure, the factors constitute the *categories* of the study, which were constructed by means of an intensive content analysis of the interview transcripts.

- Company external factors: *competitors* and *customers*
- Company internal factors: *strategic orientation, new leadership, management competencies, management preferences/priorities.*
- Contextual factors: *political frame conditions* and *industry frame conditions*

The identified factors will be described in turn below.

Company external factors

Two company external factors were identified as influential on service branding on the Hurtigruten, those of *competitors* and *customers*. The factors will be reviewed in turn.

Competitors

Historically, the Hurtigruten has been a strong brand name, but primarily to the scattered population along the Norwegian coast. As one interviewee said: *"The Hurtigruten is well-known to 'everybody' living along the coast. People living at the coast can observe the Hurtigruten every day"*. However, when the strategic decision was made to move into the explorer cruise line market as a response to a decline in subsidies from the Norwegian Government, the shipping lines, two at that time, for the first time experienced "real" competition from other cruise lines, which had gradually paid more attention to the long Norwegian coastline for their product offerings. Thus, the increasing *competitive pressure* from cruise line operators created huge challenges to the Hurtigruten monopolistic enterprises, which in the extremely new situation had to turn their attention to competitive rivals. As one interviewee said: *"We had over years given priority to the technical aspects of seamanship; to engage in competition was a new reality"*. Another interviewee said: *"Well, in this new competitive situation, we started talking about how to strengthen and differentiate our brand, the Hurtigruten, from those of our competitors"*. Another respondent claimed: *"We knew our brand was unique. Our values of safety and reliability were well known to the locals, but would they work in competition?"*

Hurtigruten ASA, a shipping line formed by the merger of two shipping lines in April 2006, the Troms Fylkes Dampskipsselskap A/S (TFDS) and the Ofoten og Vesteraalen Dampskipsselskap A/S (OVDS), according to the interviewees, has intensified its efforts to develop a strong and differentiating service brand. The management has argued convincingly that the Hurtigruten is an exotic attraction product that is quite different from a traditional "cruise product". The closeness to nature, cultural heritage, the visits to small towns and even coastal villages and the Norwegian seamen's skills cannot be copied by competitors. However, as a respondent said: *"Of course we watch our competitors, but we are different, and we are the market leader as a cruise explorer along the Norwegian coast. However, we have to carefully*

monitor our competitors, because they are searching for new cruise areas and the Norwegian coastline is interesting for them". Another interviewee expressed that: *"The cruise industry is a competitive one. It's impossible to win in competition if the brand is unknown. So, particularly after the merger in 2006, we have intensified the work on branding the Hurtigruten by putting more energy into market communication activities".* Thus, the competitors have gradually caught the attention of the Hurtigruten shipping line management, and today competitors are an important influential factor on brand development on the Hurtigruten. Thus, what the competitors do have impact on the management's work on branding the Hurtigruten.

Customers

Before the early 1990s, with the entrance of new and modern cruise ships, the "old" Hurtigruten ships were not considered as conventional cruise ships even though round-trip travellers from many countries followed the route from Bergen in the north and from Kirkenes in the south, especially during the peak summer season. In 1983, for example, only 13 000 round-trip tourists travelled on the Hurtigruten. In 1988, this number had increased to about 20 000, which was still quite a small number of travellers. In 2006, however, about 50 000 round-trip tourists participated in the round-trip journey.

In the early 1990s, the demand for cruise line products rose, especially in the growing "middle-class" American market (Biederman, 2008). The cruise line operators responded by heavy investments in new and larger ships. For a short period of time, a large number of "new" cruise tourists became highly experienced and adventure-seeking. In this situation, the question of how to satisfy the round-trip travellers on the Hurtigruten became a demanding task for the highly "product-oriented" shipping line management. As one interviewee said: *"We all felt a heavy burden was put upon us. From handling locals and goods to the care taking of more international tourists on board for eleven days created shock waves among us".* Another interviewee said: *"We were qualified seamen, not trained service personnel."* A third interviewee expressed the view that the *"top management onboard the ships stayed in the old culture of ship operations instead of a customer care culture"*. Nevertheless, in the merged shipping line of Hurtigruten ASA (2006), a more analytical approach to customers has gradually been observed, for example by the collection of customer satisfaction questionnaires. As one interviewee said: *"Yes, today we pay more attention to the customers. We know we have demanding tourists and we know they require an adventurous, but safe experience and travel"*. A respondent also said: *"We have become more market analytical in a technical sense, but a challenge is how to use the information for service and brand development"*.

The role of the customers in the build-up of service brands is well documented in the research literature. As one interviewee said: *"Hurtigruten is well known as a brand in Norway, but more work has to be done to attract more passengers"*. Another interviewee said: *"We are targeting growth and more travellers are needed. In this situation we have to intensify the work on branding"*. A third interviewee reported: *"The service brand strategy is important for the shipping line. We have intensified the work on this issue. In doing this we have to closely observe and adjust to the values and preferences of our customers."* A fourth interviewee claimed: *"The single most important factor of developing the Hurtigruten as a strong service brand is the customers. What do we do with empty ships? Nothing! Our future depends on the customers!"* A fifth interviewee said: *"To work on service branding more deeply in the shipping line is a quite new experience. There are different opinions on how to create a strong brand. However, mostly everyone agrees*

that customer orientation must steer the process. In fact, this is quite a new attitude in a previously technically oriented enterprise".

A conclusion in this part is that company external factors are important drivers of brand development on the Hurtigruten, which is a phenomenon linked to the new market situation that occurred in the early 1990s, and the extremely new corporate situation created by the merger in April 2006. Obviously, Hurtigruten ASA has become a more market-oriented enterprise than its predecessors by focusing more on customers and competitors than before, when the Hurtigruten companies operated monopolistically.

Company internal factors

The research identified four company internal factors that influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten. The factors will be reviewed in turn.

Strategic orientation

Over time, the strategic orientation of the Hurtigruten has been subject to changes. A shift accompanied the new ships in the early 1990s. As a consequence of the enhanced capacity that had to be filled by new travel groups, the strengthening of the service brand was needed, particularly in international markets. As one interviewee said: *"Yes, in the beginning of the 1990s the Hurtigruten was well known in Norway, but not in international markets. So, to strengthen the brand in new markets was important in order to sell the expanded capacity"*. Another shift in strategic orientation is observed as a consequence of the merger in 2006, particularly in relation to the strategic intent to become a world leader in explorer cruises. As explained by one interviewee: *"To become a world leader in polar cruises is a visionary goal, which, in my opinion, is hard to obtain if we do not intensify our work on making the Hurtigruten more known internationally"*. Thus, the aim of becoming a world leader in polar waters has influenced the management's work on making the service brand Hurtigruten even stronger, better known and positioned in international markets through an upgrading of the marketing, sales and quality functions.

New leadership

Several interviewees pointed out a dominant trait of the organisations after the start-up of the new shipbuilding programmes in the early 1990s; a shift in management or *new leadership*. At both the strategic and the middle management levels, new managers have joined the organisation(s) and "old" managers have left for several reasons. According to the interviewees, new leaders and managers in organisations often take broad initiatives and introduce changes that may create stress among the employees, but at the same time such stress may also bring energy to developmental processes. As one interviewee said: *"New leaders often want radical changes; especially when years of deficits have to be turned into surplus in the accounts"*. Another interviewee said: *"New leadership implies renewal and changes. The new leaders brought competitive thinking into highly structured and monopolistic organisations. The work towards markets was upgraded and more focus was paid as to how to develop the Hurtigruten brand"*. This view was supported by several interviewees. On the other hand, another interviewee expressed the view that *"still new managers focus on the economic side of the business(es). However, the new competitive situation has forced management to focus on effective competitive tools. One such tool is the service brand"*.

Hurtigruten". Thus, according to the perception of the interviewees, the role taking and orientation of the new leaders resulted in more intensified work on brand development on the *Hurtigruten*.

Management competencies

After the merger in 2006, the management functions of marketing and (service) quality were upgraded as a consequence of the build-up of capacity. In order to sell the enhanced capacity, more marketing personnel were needed together with quality personnel who were required in order to enhance the quality on the *Hurtigruten*. As one interviewee said: *"We needed more salespeople to sell the 'new' Hurtigruten, but in order to sell the Hurtigruten, more effective market communication was needed, and in doing this a strengthening of the brand was required"*. Another interviewee expressed that: *"It's simply not possible to sell an unknown product in new markets. First, we have to market the product and then sell it, but this is not possible if the brand is more or less unknown and not properly positioned in the minds of potentially new segments"*. Thus, the competencies of the new service managers and sales personnel resulted in an upgrading of the marketing, sales and quality functions in the shipping line, and as one consequence, the managerial work was intensified in order to spread knowledge on the "new" *Hurtigruten* brand to new markets.

Management preferences/priorities

One factor influencing brand development on the *Hurtigruten* that was mentioned by several interviewees was *management preferences*. Historically, economists have dominated the top management positions in the shipping line(s), and due to years of deficits in the accounts despite huge subsidies from the Norwegian Government, plans for cost reductions were given top priority. As one interviewee said: *"The economists and their consultants are really driving the Hurtigruten"*. In this situation, the organisational strength and power were put into organisational processes to become cost-effective organisations.

Nevertheless, with the gradual reduction of subsidies from the Norwegian Government in the 1990s and the strategic decision to turn the organisation(s) into market oriented and competitive units, external orientation became essential. One example of this is provided by the attempts made by the management to develop the service brand to better position the brand internationally. As one interviewee said: *"To a large extent, the Hurtigruten has been a well-kept secret in many foreign markets, except for the Germany, the US and the UK markets for quite a long time. In order to compete, management had to pay more attention to the market side of the companies"*.

The shift from highly protective to competitive organisation(s) as outlined above, implied managerial efforts to strengthen the service brand. The brand *Hurtigruten* became a weapon in competition. As one interviewee said: *"The move into competition implied more focus on the market side of the organisation. Obviously, the Hurtigruten as a power brand may give the Hurtigruten ASA a competitive advantage"*. Another interviewee said: *"To develop the brand was considered important. However, this was considered a task for top management"*. A third interviewee said: *"In the past the Hurtigruten as a brand was taken for granted. Today management understands that the brand has to be further developed and positioned. The components of the brand have to be focused on by management"*.

A conclusion in this section is that a set of company internal factors has influenced on the brand development on the *Hurtigruten*. In particular, as a consequence of the strategic reorientation by new

leadership, the enterprise has gradually changed into a more market-oriented enterprise which also is a key trait of the enterprise today. Thus, the work on branding the Hurtigruten has been upgraded.

Contextual factors

The research identified two contextual factors that influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten, those of *political frame conditions* and *industry frame conditions*.

Political frame conditions

The Hurtigruten has been an important means of infrastructure in Norway since the opening of the coastal route in 1893. The Hurtigruten has over time received a substantial amount of subsidies from Norwegian taxpayers. The operation of a monopolistic route along the Norwegian coast has implied stability and "status quo" in business conduct. According to the interviewees, the political frame conditions may have hindered the development of the Hurtigruten core product and supplementary services. However, the subsidies have in the recent past, particularly during the 2000s, gradually been reduced and the Hurtigruten has gradually increased its income by means of selling more travels to international markets. One interviewee said that: *"We did not need to work to strengthen our effort on branding the Hurtigruten in Norway when the Hurtigruten was a means of pure transportation of locals and goods. But, when the Hurtigruten turned into a tourist product, of course, there was a need to enhance managerial work on branding the Hurtigruten"*. Thus, for decades, the political frame condition had been a hindrance to managerial work on branding the Hurtigruten, but particularly since 2006 and the entrance into international competition, the managerial work on branding the Hurtigruten in international markets has been enhanced and is given priority today.

Industry frame conditions

In Norway, the labour party has been the dominant political power. A stand has been to excel in "control" of the market forces by setting strict standards and imposing regulations. Economic support has been given to industries from which, for example, the Hurtigruten benefited when shipyards were supported economically in times of recession in the late 1980s. As a consequence, the industry frame conditions have not geared the developmental processes on the Hurtigruten. However, gradually, and particularly in recent years, the labour party has moved towards a market-oriented philosophy, leaving the destiny of organisations to the markets. An illustration of this is a reduction of economic support to business sectors. One interviewee expressed that: *"Our destiny was in the hands of government by favourable economic support, so in this situation we focused on the transport of locals and goods and not on competition and branding the Hurtigruten"*. Another interviewee expressed that: *"Yes, the reduction of beneficial industry frame conditions resulted in intensified focus on customers, competitors and the branding aspects of the Hurtigruten"*. Thus, due to changes in industry frame conditions, the management of the Hurtigruten had to "stand more on its own", and one consequence was to enhance the managerial work on branding the product, particularly in international markets.

The research on service branding on the prestigious Hurtigruten has shown that this interesting phenomenon has been influenced by a set of factors that may be organised into three different groups, those of company internal, company external and contextual factors. The fact that the Hurtigruten has

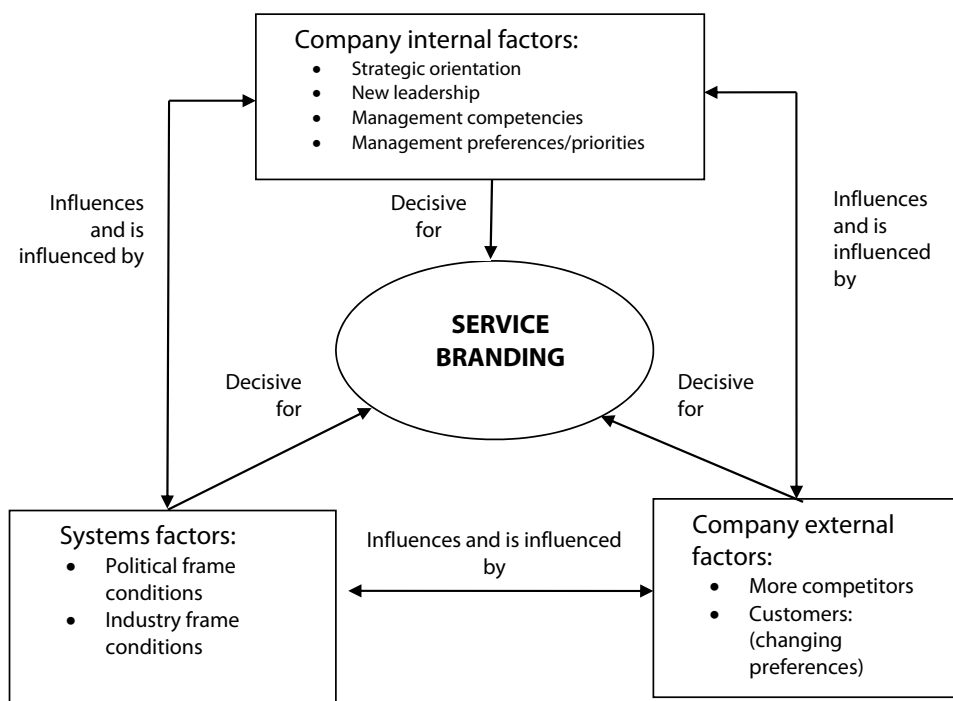
been transformed from a monopoly enterprise into a market-oriented enterprise in quite a short period of time has positively impacted on the management work on branding the Hurtigruten, particularly in international markets.

Research question 2:

How do the identified factors influence service branding on the Hurtigruten?

How service branding is influenced by the identified factors, as well as how the factors interact, is depicted in the model below.

Figure 1
Factors influencing service branding: The Hurtigruten case



The model follows from the factors identified in the research and reads as follows: During the last decades the international cruise line markets have expanded into new market segments, first in the US, but now also in European countries (Biederman, 2008). An increasing number of experienced, well-off and demanding cruise line tourists of different nationalities with *changing market preferences* together with an increase in the supply of new and bigger ships have created *competitive pressure* in the cruise industry. In the new competitive situation, the cruise line carriers have undertaken more in order to differentiate the total service offerings from those of the competitors to obtain a competitive edge. In order to achieve this, the management of the Hurtigruten has upgraded the work on developing a strong, well positioned and differentiating service brand in the minds of the travellers. When acting, management *preferences/priorities* are built into the organisational processes to improve the service performance and overall business conduct. Nevertheless, a dominant managerial trait of the Hurtigruten

shipping line(s) over time has been *new leaders* in top leadership positions. The competencies of the *new leadership* have influenced the management's decisions regarding the building of a strong, differentiating and competitive service brand. Similarly, the *system factors* have impacted on the managerial work on branding the Hurtigruten, but negatively, because the political and industry frame conditions have not driven change and developmental processes but instead contributed to stability and "business as usual" in business conduct.

Nevertheless, the model developed is highly contextual due to the single-case study approach employed in the research, but the model may have wider implications beyond the examined research setting. New tourist groups may possess novel wants, needs and preferences and shifting market preferences are universal traits of the service economy. Similarly, with the increased demand for services, new entrants or suppliers emerge on the economic scene, trying to act differently from competitors. How to respond to this situation is entirely for the management to decide. However, new members entering (top) management positions often imply changes in the way business is conducted. Thus, following the arguments above, the model suggested may provide an insight into and understanding of how a key set of factors may influence service brand development beyond the service setting examined, at least in other cruise line enterprises.

Discussion

Service brands are important strategic resources and, according to theory, service branding is viewed as a complex and holistic process that needs to be effectively organised and managed (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; Trott, 2005) and the process view of service branding is confirmed by the research conducted on the Hurtigruten.

Similarly, from the summer of 1893, when the Hurtigruten was established, to the beginning of the 1990s, the Hurtigruten, according to the interviewees, had become a historic and corporate brand well known to the Norwegian coastal population, but less well known internationally. The value of possessing a famous historic brand name associated with historic dimensions of tradition and exoticness may be an advantage in positioning the brand internationally (Boyle, 2007). Similarly, according to theory, to be perceived as a "power brand" (Gale, 1994) is beneficial in relation to customers as well as the competitors and a power brand is associated with a set of favourable brand values. The historic brand Hurtigruten, according to the interviewees, is first of all perceived by the locals associated with values like *safety*, *regularity* and *reliability*. These values are important to tourists as well, but in order to compete in international markets, additional values have to be incorporated to be evaluated favourably by new travel groups; values like comfort, service-mindedness, relaxation, beauty, exoticness, etc. Thus, the advantages of attractive values in brand development are confirmed by the research carried out on the Hurtigruten. Nevertheless, the Hurtigruten as a historic, corporate and power brand, according to the interviewees, in future needs to develop a cluster of functional as well as emotional values (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003) which are valued by the new segments and that effectively differentiate the brand from the competitors.

Practise shows that many brands fail (Koht, 1997) but some successful service brands have survived for tens of years. Boeing, as one example, dates back to 1916! According to Hankinson and Hankinson

(1999) and Simoes and Dibb (2001), most successful service brands are the outcome of years of strategic planning and investment, and, according to theory, a successful service brand combines an effective product, a distinctive identity and added values as perceived by customers (Trott, 2005) and these criteria seem to fit quite well with the Hurtigruten. Nevertheless, according to the interviewees, the gradual transition of the Hurtigruten to a world-wide competitive tourism attraction product has increased the necessity to position the cruise product Hurtigruten even better in the minds of international target markets, because the management of the Hurtigruten has to approach new market segments strategically, which requires a renewal of the branding strategy grounded on the values of younger adventurous travel groups, like exploration and risk taking.

The research has shown that a set of factors has influenced on services branding on the Hurtigruten, as portrayed in the Figure 1. The research findings support the value of a relationship approach to branding (Grönroos, 2007). The relationship approach emphasises the role of different stakeholders in service branding development (Deny-Jones, 1995) which implies both an external and an internal orientation in brand development (Urde, 2003). However, this does not seem to have been the case on the Hurtigruten. The research findings do not provide any evidence of a dual-oriented process according to Urde's view (2003). On the contrary, service branding on the Hurtigruten seems to be externally oriented and role of branding seems to be that of an "isolated" market communication tool. In this way, according to theory, an internal focus is lacking. According to theory, an internal orientation of service branding is grounded on a well-developed and functioning service culture (Kotter & Heskett, 1992) in which the service employees play a key role (Lovelock & Wright, 1999). This then implies a bottom-up approach to service branding (McDonald *et al.*, 2001). Nevertheless, in an extremely new situation with emerging competition and shifting tourists' preferences and values, the management, according to the interviewees, faces challenges in transforming the Hurtigruten company into a strong and well-functioning service culture, which implies a change towards bottom-up principles of (service) management (Grönroos, 2007; McDonald *et al.*, 2001). This, for example, suggests a more analytical approach to customer care, by for instance examining more thoroughly the customer values that are important for the further development of the service brand Hurtigruten.

Implications and conclusions

Theoretical implications

The present study has provided a thorough understanding of and insight into service branding in a cruise line context by an examination of a set of influencing factors on brand development on the Hurtigruten. A series of invigorating findings has been produced which has theoretical implication. First, the company internal factors show that new leadership implies strategic reorientation, renewal and change oriented management (Daft, 1997). In this way the research confirms the contingency view of organisational change (Hunt, 1997), because what takes place in a unique organisational setting is influenced by contextual conditions. Second, the company external factors confirms the key role of customers and competitors in service brand development (Grönroos, 2007) because, as evidenced in services branding theory (Aaker, 1996), a set of factor to successful branding has been identified (Simmons, 2007), which are grounded on a set of perspectives on services branding, including an

integrative perspective (Brodie, 2009). Third, the system factors reported on in the research show that some factors are beyond the control of a company in brand development. According to the interviewees, the political frame conditions, in particular, have been a hindrance to brand development as the economic support/subsidies did not encourage new ways of operating the Hurtigruten. Thus, the role of contextual boundaries is supported in this research.

Implications for management

The Hurtigruten attraction product consists of both tangible and intangible elements. The tangible elements are quite easy for competitors to copy. A cabin on the Hurtigruten is comparable with one on any other cruise ship and does not provide any competitive advantage. Similarly, the restaurants on the Hurtigruten are quite like restaurants on other cruise ships. Consequently, in order to gain a competitive advantage and to be a lead explorer cruise line operator, the intangible elements are the key factors in business survival. First of all are the differentiating values of the Hurtigruten, as perceived by travellers. The values of for example Norwegians' seamanship, safety and quality are competitive components to be used as brand messages. However, more work has to be undertaken in order to turn the shipping line into a well-functioning service organisation. The importance of a distinct service culture and the role of service employees in creating effective service encounters have to be addressed by the top management in Hurtigruten ASA.

The successful merger in 2006 created initiatives and plans to develop one strong, differentiating and competitive service enterprise. The further planning and development of the service brand Hurtigruten have been given priority by the top management. In the situation when time was a critical factor, brand development was top-down driven. However, as a service brand has to be rooted in the whole enterprise, a top-down process may lack support in the lower organisational layers of the organisation. As the service brand will serve both internal and external purposes, a process including all the members of the organisation has to be considered in the future, which implies a bottom-up process for service branding.

A finding of this study is that service brand development is only to a certain extent analytical in orientation. This implies that the management in future has to bring more analytical elements into the process by examining thoroughly the needs, wants and preferences of the targeted travellers and to monitor competitors' new product offerings. In addition, as the service employees are important for the service provider's service delivery, their attitudes, opinions and values have to be examined. This implies that the shipping line management would be advised to carry out an external as well as an internal service brand development process on the Hurtigruten.

In order to achieve time-effective service brand development, the brand process has to be formal and structured in orientation. Accordingly, the management is advised to involve the service employees more actively in branding processes. Thus, in future the management is advised to employ bottom-up, analytical and formally oriented service brand development grounded on the historical roots of the service brand Hurtigruten. In this way, the developmental work may have both a strong internal and a strong external orientation.

Conclusions

The research reported in this paper has aimed to provide a thorough understanding of service branding in a cruise line context by an examination of this phenomenon on the prestigious Hurtigruten. A qualitative research design has guided the research, and the single-case study has proved to be a relevant case methodology in order to obtain a "deep" and "comprehensive" understanding of an interesting research phenomenon. One important research design detail was the selection of interviewees and another detail was the collection of "rich" and "deep" and reliable information from the interviewees. The nine participants were selected by means of a snowball sampling procedure and they were assessed as being the most knowledgeable and skilled persons on service branding on the Hurtigruten. The data collection phase was carried out by the use of in-depth interviews, which is the most frequently used data collection technique in management research. The research identified a set of factors that have influenced on service branding on the Hurtigruten, which can be allocated to three different groups; those of *company internal*, *company external* and *contextual factors*. By building on the identified factors, a contextual model was offered that showed how the different factors interacted and influenced on service branding. Nevertheless, as a single-case study, the research findings are restricted to the selected research setting of the Hurtigruten only, because, as emphasised by Clark *et al.* (1988, p. 59), "*the intention of the case study is not to make generalisations, but to investigate a 'one-off' situation*". Thus, the research reported in this paper does not claim generalisability, as the intention of a single-case study is to provide an insight into and understanding of an interesting case (Gummesson, 2000).

Nevertheless, the research may suffer from limitations and challenges, particularly in relation to three issues: First, the selection of interviewees; second, the memory and recall of the interviewees; and third, the time of the data collection. One important question is whether important informants have been omitted from the convenience sample. However, by employing a snowball sampling procedure, the research seems to have included the most skilled and knowledgeable persons on service branding on the Hurtigruten. A second question concerns the recall and memory of the interviewees; to what degree did the interviewees correctly recall the details of service branding in the company? However, in this respect, the research that was undertaken has faced the same challenges as all retrospective qualitative studies (Johannessen *et al.* 2004), but by following a research strategy to allow the respondents to review their cases, one hindrance to obtaining quality in research may be eliminated. Similarly, the time of data collection may be questioned. However, by the time of the data collection (2006 and 2007), the knowledge of and the positioning of the Hurtigruten brand was quite well established in the international cruise markets. Consequently, the relevance of the data seems high even a few years later (2012). Nevertheless, more research on service branding on the Hurtigruten is required. It would, for example, be interesting to carry out a qualitative follow-up study by collecting new and "fresh" data on service branding on the Hurtigruten, which could provide a more contemporary report on the present situation. Such data would also be beneficial and useful for comparative purposes, while simultaneously tracing changes in how work on service branding is conducted on the Hurtigruten. Another approach would be to expand the research focus by including more cruise line carriers in a study. Such a study would provide knowledge on service branding in the cruise line industry as a whole.

Appendix 1

Informative details of the Hurtigruten (2012)

On 2 July 1893, the Norwegian steamship D/S Vesteraalen left Trondheim to embark on a voyage from Trondheim to Hammerfest. About 70 hours later, the ship arrived successfully in Hammerfest. The Norwegian Parliament had decided three weeks earlier to establish a coastal route along the Norwegian coastline from Trondheim to Hammerfest. To sail both day and night along one of the most weather-beaten coasts in the world under all climatic conditions was a new and quite astonishing idea. Despite scepticism and even severe resistance from experts in sea transport in Norway, the Norwegian Coastal Voyage or *Hurtigruten*, as its brand name, became a logistic success in sea transport. In 1898, the route was extended to Bergen in the south, and from 1908 to Kirkenes in the north. Today, more than 100 years later, the Hurtigruten has become a tourist attraction product of significant importance in Norway, comprising 2500 nautical miles, 34 ports of call, 11 ships and an 11-day return voyage from Bergen to Kirkenes.

Appendix 1 shows a map of the travel route as it is today (2012)

The sailing route of the Hurtigruten



Appendix 2

Examples of the "old" and "new" Hurtigruten

MS Hakon Jarl (1952): An example of the "old" Hurtigruta



MS Nord Norge (1997): An example of the "new" Hurtigruta



Appendix 3

The interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE: To provide information on **service branding** on the Norwegian Coastal Voyage (Hurtigruten):

1. Introduction to the interview: About the researcher, about the research project, the questions to be raised, the anonymity of the interviewee, the rights of interviewees, etc.

2. The research questions:

- Which key factors influence on managerial work on service branding on the Hurtigruten?
- How do the key factors influence on service branding on the Hurtigruten?

3. Questions to the interviewees:

Research question 1:

- Please explain in your own words which **factors** you consider most important in influencing service branding on the Hurtigruten.
- Can you please elaborate more on the most influential source, the second most influential, etc.

Follow-up question:

- What do you consider to be the main barriers to the development of a strong corporate service brand?
- What do you consider are the main drivers of service branding on the Hurtigruten?

Research question 2:

- Please explain in your own words what you consider to be the key characteristics/features of service brand development on the Hurtigruten.
- Please elaborate more on the outlined characteristics/features of the service branding on the Hurtigruten.

4. Ending the interview:

- Something the interviewee wants to add?
- Follow-up questions?

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Submitted: 09/15/2103

Accepted: 12/12/2103